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THE RELIGION OF A MAN OF LETTERS

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

TO THE CLASSICAL ASSOCIATION

JANUARY 8, 1918

RELIGIO GRAMMATICI

THE RELIGION OF A MAN OF LETTERS

GILBERT MURRAY

WITHDRAWN
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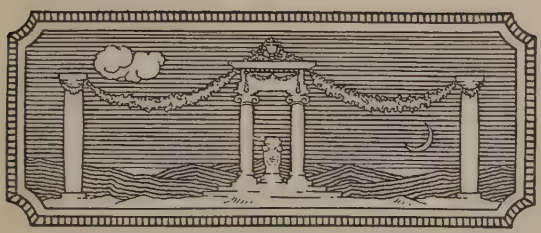
THE RELIGION OF A MAN OF LETTERS



It is the general custom of this association to choose as its president alternately a classical scholar and a man of wide eminence outside the classics. Next year you are to have a man of science, a great physician who is also famous in the world of learning and literature. Last year you had a statesman, though a statesman who is also a great scholar and man of letters, a sage and counsellor in the antique mould, of world-wide fame and unique influence.[1] And since, between these two, you have chosen, in your kindness to me, a professional scholar and teacher, you might well expect from him

[1] Sir William Osler and Lord Bryce.

an address containing practical educational advice in a practical educational crisis. But that, I fear, is just what I cannot give. My experience is too one-sided. I know little of schools and not much even of pass-men. I know little of such material facts as curricula and time-tables and parents and examination-papers. I sometimes feel, as all men of fifty should, my ignorance even of boys and girls. Besides that, I have the honour at present to be an official of the Board of Education; and in public discussions of current educational subjects an officer of the Board must in duty be like the heroine of Shelley's tragedy, "He cannot argue, he can only feel."

I believe, therefore, that the best I can do, when the horizon looks somewhat dark, not only for the particular studies which we in this society love most, but for the habits of mind which we connect with those studies, — the philosophic temper, the gentle

judgment, the interest in knowledge and beauty for their own sake,—will be simply, with your assistance, to look inward and try to realize my own confession of faith. I do, as a matter of fact, feel clear that, even if knowledge of Greek, instead of leading to bishoprics, as it once did, is in future to be regarded with popular suspicion as a mark of either a reactionary or an unusually feckless temper, I am nevertheless not in the least sorry that I have spent a large part of my life in Greek studies, not in the least penitent that I have been the cause of others doing the same. That is my feeling, and there must be some base for it. There must be such a thing as *religio grammatici*, the special religion of a man of letters.

The greater part of life for both man and beast is rigidly confined in the round of things that happen from hour to hour. It is ἐπὶ συμφοραῖς, exposed for circumstances to beat upon; its stream of consciousness

channelled and directed by the events and environments of the moment. Man is imprisoned in the external present; and what we call a man's religion is, to a great extent, the thing that offers him a secret and permanent means of escape from that prison, a breaking of the prison walls which leaves him standing, of course, still in the present, but in a present so enlarged and enfranchised that it is become, not a prison, but a free world. Religion, even in the narrow sense, is always looking for Soteria, for escape, for some salvation from the terror to come, or some deliverance from the body of this death.

And men find it, of course, in a thousand ways, with different degrees of ease and of certainty. I am not wishing to praise my talisman at the expense of other talismans. Some find it in theology; some in art, in human affection, in the anodyne of constant work, in that permanent exercise of the in-

quiring intellect which is commonly called the search for truth; some find it in carefully cultivated illusions of one sort or another, in passionate faiths and undying pugnacities; some, I believe, find a substitute by simply rejoicing in their prison, and living furiously, for good or ill, in the actual moment.

And a scholar, I think, secures his freedom by keeping hold always of the past, and treasuring up the best out of the past, so that in a present that may be angry or sordid he can call back memories of calm or of high passion, in a present that requires resignation or courage he can call back the spirit with which brave men long ago faced the same evils. He draws out of the past high thoughts and great emotions; he also draws the strength that comes from communion or brotherhood.

> Blind Thamyris and blind Mæonides,
> And Tiresias and Phineus, prophets old,

come back to comfort another blind poet in his affliction. The Psalms, turned into strange languages, their original meaning often lost, live on as a real influence in human life, a strong and almost always an ennobling influence. I know the figures in the tradition may be unreal, their words may be misinterpreted, but the communion is quite a real fact. And the student, as he realizes it, feels himself one of a long line of torch-bearers. He attains that which is the most compelling desire of every human being, a work in life which it is worth living for, and which is not cut short by the accident of his own death.

It is in that sense that I understand *religio*. And now I would ask you to consider with me the proper meaning of *grammatikê* and the true business of the man of letters or *grammaticus*.

II

A VERY, very long time ago — the palæontologists refuse to give us dates — mankind, trying to escape from his mortality, invented *grammata*, or letters. Instead of being content with his spoken words, ἔπεα πτερόεντα, which fly as a bird flies and are past, he struck out the plan of making marks on wood or stone or bone or leather or some other material, significant marks which should somehow last on, charged with meaning, in place of the word that had perished. Of course the subjects for such perpetuation were severely selected. Vastly the greater part of man's life, even now, is in the moment, the sort of thing that is lived and passes without causing any particular regret, or rousing any definite action for the purpose of retaining it. And when the whole process of writing or graving was as difficult as it must have been in remote antiquity, the words that were recorded, the moments

that were, so to speak, made imperishable, must have been very rare indeed. One is tempted to think of the end of "Faust": was not the graving of a thing on brass or stone, was not even the painting of a reindeer in the depths of a palæolithic cave, a practical, though imperfect, method, of saying to the moment, "*Verweile doch, Du bist so schön*" ("Stay longer, thou art so beautiful")? Of course the choice was, as you would expect, mostly based on material considerations and on miserably wrong considerations at that. I suppose the greater number of very ancient inscriptions, or *grammata*, known to the world consist either of magical or religious formulæ, supposed to be effective in producing material welfare; or else titles of kings and honorific records of their achievements; or else contracts and laws in which the spoken word eminently needed preserving. Either charms or else boasts or else contracts; and it is worth re-

membering that so far as they have any interest for us now, it is an interest quite different from that for which they were engraved. They were all selected for immortality by reason of some present personal urgency. The charm was expected to work; the boast delighted the heart of the boaster; the contract would compel certain slippery or forgetful persons to keep their word. And now we know that the charm did not work. We do not know who the boaster was, and, if we did, should probably not admire him for the thing he boasts about. And the slippery or forgetful persons have long since been incapable of either breaking or fulfilling the contract. We are in each case only interested in some quality in the record which is different from that for which people recorded it. Of course there may be also the mere historical interest in these things as facts; but that again is quite different from the motive for their recording.

In fact, one might say to all these records of human life, all these *grammata* that have come down to us, what Marcus Aurelius teaches us to say to ourselves: *ψυχάριον εἶ βάστοζον νέκρον*, or, each one is "a little soul carrying a corpse." Each one, besides the material and temporary message it bears, is a record, however imperfect, of human life and character and feeling. In so far as the record can get across the boundary that separates mere record of fact from philosophy or poetry, so far it has a soul and still lives.

This is clearest, of course, in the records to which we can definitely attribute beauty. Take a tragedy of Æschylus, a dialogue of Plato; take one of the very ancient Babylonian hymns or an oracle of Isaiah. The prophecy of Isaiah referred primarily to a definite set of facts and contained some definite — and generally violent — political advice; but we often do not know what

those facts were, nor care one way or another about the advice. We love the prophecy and value it because of some quality of beauty, which subsists, when the value of the advice is long dead, because of some soul that is there which does not perish. It is the same with those magnificent Babylonian hymns. The recorders were doubtless aware of their beauty, but they thought much more of their religious effectiveness. With the tragedy of Æschylus or the dialogue of Plato the case is different, but only different in degree. If we ask why they were valued and recorded, the answer must be that it was mainly for their poetic beauty and philosophic truth, the very reasons for which they are read and valued now. But even here it is easy to see that there must have been some causes at work which derived their force simply from the urgency of the present, and therefore died when that present faded away.

And similarly an ancient work may, or indeed must, gather about itself new special environments and points of relevance. Thucydides and Aristophanes' "Knights" and even Jane Austen are different things now from what they were in 1913. I can imagine a translation of the "Knights" which would read like a brand-new topical satire. No need to labour the point. I think it is clear that in any great work of literature there is a soul which lives and a body which perishes; and further, since the soul cannot ever be found naked without any body at all, it is making for itself all the time new bodies, changing with the times.

III

Both soul and body are preserved, imperfectly of course, in *grammata*, or letters; in a long series of marks scratched, daubed, engraved, written, or printed, stretching from the inscribed bone implements and

painted rocks of prehistoric man through the great literatures of the world down to this morning's newspaper and the manuscript from which I am reading — marks which have their own history also and their own vast varieties. And "the office of the art *grammatikê* is so to deal with the *grammata* as to recover from them all that can be recovered of that which they have saved from oblivion, to reinstate as far as possible the spoken word in its first impressiveness and musicalness."[1] That is not a piece of modern sentiment. It is the strict doctrine of the scribes. Dionysius Thrax gives us the definition: ἡ Γραμματική is ἐμπειρία τις ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ τῶν παρὰ ποιήταις τε καὶ συγγραφεῦσι λεγομένων; an ἐμπειρία, a skill produced by practice, in the things said in poets and prose-writers; and he goes on to divide it into six parts, of which the first and most essential is reading aloud

[1] Rutherford, *History of Annotation*, p. 12.

κατὰ προσῳδίαν, with just the accent, the cadences, the expression, with which the words were originally spoken before they were turned from λόγοι to γράμματα, from "winged" words to permanent letters. The other five parts are concerned with analysis; interpretation of figures of speech; explanation of obsolete words and customs; etymology; grammar in the narrow modern sense; and lastly κρίσις ποιημάτων, or, roughly, literary criticism. The first part is synthetic and in a sense creative, and most of the others are subservient to it. For I suppose, if you had attained by study the power of reading aloud a play of Shakespeare exactly as Shakespeare intended the words to be spoken, you would be pretty sure to have mastered the figures of speech and obsolete words and niceties of grammar. At any rate, whether or no you could manage the etymologies and the literary criticism, you would have done the main

thing. You would, subject to the limitations we considered above, have recreated the play.

We intellectuals of the twentieth century, poor things, are so intimately accustomed to the use of *grammata* that probably many of us write more than we talk and read far more than we listen. Language has become to us primarily a matter of *grammata*. We have largely ceased to demand from the readers of a book any imaginative transliteration into the living voice. But mankind was slow in acquiescing in this renunciation. Isocrates in a well-known passage (5, 10) of his "Letter to Philip," laments that the scroll he sends will not be able to say what he wants it to say. Philip will hand it to a secretary, and the secretary, neither knowing nor caring what it is all about, will read it out "with no persuasiveness, no indication of changes of feeling, as if he were giving a list of items." The early

Arab writers in the same situation used to meet it squarely. The sage wrote his own book and trained his disciples to read it aloud, each sentence exactly right; and generally, to avoid the mistakes of the ordinary untrained reader, he took care that the script should not be intelligible to such persons.

These instances show us in what spirit the first *grammatici*, our fathers in the art, conceived their task, and what a duty they have laid upon us. I am not, of course, overlooking the other and perhaps more extensive side of a scholar's work — the side which regards a piece of ancient or foreign writing as a phenomenon of language to be analyzed and placed, not as a thing of beauty to be re-created or kept alive. On that side of his work the *grammaticus* is a man of science or *Wissenschaft*, like another. The science of language demands for its successful study the same rigorous exact-

itude as the other natural sciences, while it has for educational purposes some advantages over most of them. Notably, its subject-matter is intimately familiar to the average student, and his ear very sensitive to its varieties. The study of it needs almost no apparatus, and gives great scope for variety and originality of attack. Lastly, its extent is vast and its subtlety almost infinite; for it is a record, and a very fine one, of all the immeasurable varieties and gradations of human consciousness. Indeed, as the *grammata* are related to the spoken word, so is the spoken word itself related to the thought or feeling. It is the simplest record, the first precipitation. But I am not dealing now with the *grammaticus* as a man of science or an educator of the young; I am considering that part of his function which belongs specially to *religio* or *pietas*.

IV

On these lines we see that the scholar's special duty is to turn the written signs in which old poetry or philosophy is now enshrined back into living thought or feeling. He must so understand as to re-live. And here he is met at the present day by a direct frontal criticism. "Suppose, after great toil and the expenditure of much subtlety of intellect, you succeed in re-living the best works of the past, is that a desirable end? Surely our business is with the future and present, not with the past. If there is any progress in the world or any hope for struggling humanity, does it not lie precisely in shaking off the chains of the past and looking steadily forward?" How shall we meet this question?

First, we may say, the chains of the mind are not broken by any form of ignorance. The chains of the mind are broken by understanding. And so far as men are

unduly enslaved by the past, it is by understanding the past that they may hope to be freed. But, secondly, it is never really the past — the true past — that enslaves us; it is always the present. It is not the conventions of the seventeenth or eighteenth century that now make men conventional. It is the conventions of our own age, though, of course, I would not deny that in any age there are always fragments of the uncomprehended past still floating like dead things pretending to be alive. What one always needs for freedom is some sort of escape from the thing that now holds him. A man who is the slave of theories must get outside them and see facts; a man who is the slave of his own desires and prejudices must widen the range of his experience and imagination. But the thing that enslaves us most, narrows the range of our thought, cramps our capacities, and lowers our standards, is the mere present — the present that is all round

us, accepted and taken for granted, as we in London accept the grit in the air and the dirt on our hands and faces. The material present, the thing that is omnipotent over us, not because it is either good or evil, but just because it happens to be here, is the great jailer and imprisoner of man's mind; and the only true method of escape from him is the contemplation of things that are not present. Of the future? Yes; but you cannot study the future. You can only make conjectures about it, and the conjectures will not be much good unless you have in some way studied other places and other ages. There has been hardly any great forward movement of humanity which did not draw inspiration from the knowledge or the idealization of the past.

No: to search the past is not to go into prison. It is to escape out of prison, because it compels us to compare the ways of our own age with other ways. And as to prog-

ress, it is no doubt a real fact. To many of us it is a truth that lies somewhere near the roots of our religion. But it is never a straight march forward; it is never a result that happens of its own accord. It is only a name for the mass of accumulated human effort, successful here, baffled there, misdirected and driven astray in a third region, but on the whole and in the main producing some cumulative result. I believe this difficulty about progress, this fear that in studying the great teachers of the past we are in some sense wantonly sitting at the feet of savages, causes real trouble of mind to many keen students. The full answer to it would take us beyond the limits of this paper and beyond my own range of knowledge. But the main lines of the answer seem to me clear. There are in life two elements, one transitory and progressive, the other comparatively, if not absolutely, non-progressive and eternal, and the soul of man is

chiefly concerned with the second. Try to compare our inventions, our material civilization, our stores of accumulated knowledge with those of the age of Æschylus or Aristotle or St. Francis, and the comparison is absurd. Our superiority is beyond question and beyond measure. But compare any chosen poet of our age with Æschylus, any philosopher with Aristotle, any saintly preacher with St. Francis, and the result is totally different. I do not wish to argue that we have fallen below the standard of those past ages; but it is clear that we are not definitely above them. The things of the spirit depend on will, on effort, on aspiration, on the quality of the individual soul, and not on discoveries and material advances which can be accumulated and added up.

As I tried to put the point some ten years ago, in my inaugural address at Oxford: —

One might say roughly that material things are superseded, but spiritual things not; or that everything considered as an achievement can be superseded, but considered as so much life, not. Neither classification is exact, but let it pass. Our own generation is perhaps unusually conscious of the element of change. We live, since the opening of the great epoch of scientific invention in the nineteenth century, in a world utterly transformed from any that existed before. Yet we know that behind all changes the main web of life is permanent. The joy of an Egyptian child of the First Dynasty in a clay doll was every bit as keen as the joy of a child now in a number of vastly better dolls. Her grief was as great when it was taken away. Those are very simple emotions, but I believe the same holds good of emotions much more complex. The joy and grief of the artist in his art, of the strong man in his fighting, of the seeker after knowledge or righteousness in his many wanderings; these and things like them, all the great terrors and desires and beauties, belong somewhere to the permanent stuff of which daily life consists; they go with hunger and thirst and love and the facing of death. And these it is that make the permanence of literature. There are many elements in the work of Homer or Æschylus

which are obsolete and even worthless, but there is no surpassing their essential poetry. It is there, a permanent power which we can feel or fail to feel, and if we fail the world is poorer. And the same is true, though a little less easy to see, of the essential work of the historian or the philosopher.

You will say, perhaps, that I am still denying the essence of human progress; denying the progress of the human soul, and admitting only the sort of progress that consists in the improvement of tools, the discovery of new facts, the re-combining of elements. As to that I can only admit frankly that I am not clear.

I believe we do not know enough to answer. I observe that some recent authorities are arguing that we have all done injustice to our palæolithic forefathers when we drew pictures of them with small brain-pans and no chins. They had brains as large and perhaps as exquisitely convoluted as our own, while their achievements against the

gigantic beasts of prey that surrounded them show a courage and ingenuity and power of unselfish coöperation which have perhaps never since been surpassed. As to that I can form no opinion ; I can quite imagine that by the standards of the last judgment some of our modern philanthropists and military experts may cut rather a poor figure beside some nameless Magdalenian or Mousterian who died to save another, or, naked and almost weaponless, defeated a sabre-tooth tiger or a cave bear. But I should be more inclined to lay stress on two points. First, on the extreme recentness, by anthropological standards, of the whole of our historic period. Man has been on the earth perhaps some twenty-odd thousand years, and it is only the last three thousand that we are much concerned with. To suppose that a modern Englishman must necessarily be at a higher stage of mental development than an ancient Greek is almost

the same mistake as to argue that Browning must be a better poet than Wordsworth because he came later. If the soul, or the brain, of man is developing, it is not developing so fast or so steadily as all that.

And next I would observe that the moving force in human progress is not widespread over the world. The uplifting of man has been the work of a chosen few; a few cities, a few races, a few great ages, have scaled the heights for us and made the upward way easy. And the record in the *grammata* is precisely the record of these chosen few. Of course the record is redundant. It contains masses of matter that is now dead. Of course, also, it is incomplete. There lived brave men before Agamemnon. There have been saints, sages, heroes, lovers, inspired poets in multitudes and multitudes, whose thoughts for one reason or another were never enshrined in the record, or, if recorded, were soon obliterated. The

treasures man has wasted must be vastly greater than those he has saved. But, such as it is, with all its imperfections, the record he has kept is the record of the triumph of the human soul — the triumph, or, in Aristotle's sense of the word, the tragedy.

It is there. That is my present argument. The soul of man, comprising the forces that have made progress and those that have achieved in themselves the end of progress, the moments of living to which he has said that they are too beautiful to be allowed to pass — the soul of man stands at the door and knocks; it is for each one of us to open or not to open.

For we must not forget the extraordinary frailty of the tenure on which these past moments of glory hold their potential immortality. They live only in so far as we can reach them; and we can reach them only by some labour, some skill, some imaginative effort, and some sacrifice. They

cannot compel us; and if we do not open to them, they die.

V

And here perhaps we should meet another of the objections raised by modernists against our preoccupation with the past. "Granted, they will say, that the ancient poets and philosophers were all that you say, surely the valuable parts of their thought have been absorbed long since in the common fund of humanity. Archimedes, we are told, invented the screw; Eratosthenes invented the conception of longitude. Well, now we habitually operate with screws and longitude, both in a greatly improved form. And when we have recorded the names of those two worthies and put up imaginary statues of them on a few scientific laboratories, we have surely repaid any debt we owe them. We do not go back laboriously, with the help of a trained *grammaticus*, and

read their works in the original. Now, admitting, what is far from clear, that Æschylus and Plato did make contributions to the spiritual wealth of the human race comparable to the inventions of the screw and of longitude, surely those contributions have been absorbed and digested, and have become parts of our ordinary daily life? Why go back and labour over their actual words? We do not most of us want to reread even Newton's 'Principia.'"

This argument raises exactly the point of difference between the humane and the physical. The invention of the screw or the telephone is a fine achievement of man; the effort and experience of the inventor make what we have called above a moment of glory. But you and I, when using the telephone, have no share whatever in that moment or that achievement. The only way in which we could begin in any way to share in them would be by a process which is

really artistic or literary — the process of studying the inventor's life, realizing exactly his difficulties and his data, and imaginatively trying to live again his triumphant experience. That would mean imaginative effort and literary study. In the mean time we use the telephone without any effort and at the same time without any spiritual gain at all — merely gain, supposing it is a gain, in practical convenience.

If we take, on the other hand, the invention, or creation, of "Romeo and Juliet," it is quite clear that you can in a sense by using it — that is, by reading it — recapture the moment of glory; but not without effort. It is different in kind from a telephone or a hot-water tap. The only way of utilizing it at all is by the method of *grammatikê;* by reading it or hearing it read and at the same time making a definite effort of imaginative understanding so as to relive, as best one can, the experience of the

creator of it. (I do not, of course, mean his whole actual experience in writing the play, but the relevant and essential part of that experience.) This method, the method of intelligent and loving study, is the only way there is of getting any sort of use out of "Romeo and Juliet." It is not quite true, but nearly true, to say that the value of "Romeo and Juliet" to any given man is exactly proportionate to the amount of loving effort he has spent in trying to re-live it. Certainly, without such effort "Romeo and Juliet" is without value and must die. It may stand at the door and knock, but its voice is not heard amid the rumble of drums of Santerre. And the same is true of all great works of art or imagination, especially those which are in any way removed from us by differences of age or of language. We need not repine at this. The fact that so many works whose value and beauty is generally recognized require effort

for their understanding is really a great benefit to contemporary and future work, because it accustoms the reader or spectator to the expectation of effort. And the unwillingness to make imaginative effort is the prime cause of almost all decay of art. It is the caterer, the man whose business it is to provide enjoyment with the very minimum of effort, who is in matters of art the real assassin.

VI

I HAVE spoken so far of *grammatikê* in the widest sense as the art of interpreting the *grammata* and so re-living the chosen moments of human life wherever they are recorded. But of course that undertaking is too vast for any human brain, and furthermore, as we have noticed above, a great mass of the matter recorded is either badly recorded or badly chosen. There has to be selection, and selection of a very drastic and ruthless kind.

It is impossible to say exactly how much of life ought to be put down in *grammata*, but it is fairly clear that in very ancient times there was too little and in modern times there is too much. Most of the books in any great library, even a library much frequented by students, lie undisturbed for generations. And if you begin what seems like the audacious and impossible task of measuring up the accumulated treasures of the race in the field of letters, it is curious how quickly in its main lines the enterprise becomes possible and even practicable. The period of recorded history is not very long. Eighty generations might well take us back before the beginnings of history-writing in Europe; and though the beginnings of Accad and of Egypt, to say nothing of the cave drawings of Altamira, might take one almost incalculably farther in time, the actual amount of *grammata* which they provide is not large. Thus, first, the period is

not very long; and, again, the extension of literature over the world is not very wide, especially if we confine ourselves to that continuous tradition of literature on which the life of modern Europe and America is built. China and India form, in the main, another tradition, which may stimulate and instruct us, but cannot be said to have formed our thought.

If you take any particular form of literature, the limits of its achievement become quickly visible. Take drama: there are not many very good plays in the world. Greece, France, England, Spain, and for brief periods Russia, Scandinavia, and Germany, have made their contributions; but, apart from the trouble of learning the languages, a man could read all the very good plays in the world in a few months. Take lyric or narrative poetry, philosophy, history: there is not so very much first-rate lyric poetry in the world, nor yet narrative,

nor much first-rate philosophy, nor even history. No doubt when you consider the books that have to be read in order to study the history of a particular modern period, say the time of Napoleon or the French Revolution, the number seems absolutely vast and overwhelming; but when you look for those histories which have the special gift that we are considering — that is, the gift of retaining and expressing a very high quality of thought or emotion — the number dwindles at an amazing rate. And in every one of these forms of literature that I have mentioned, as well as many others, we shall find our list of the few selected works of outstanding genius begin with a Greek name.

"That depends," our modernist may say, "on the principles on which you make your selection. Of course the average *grammaticus* of the present day will begin his selected historians with Herodotus and Thu-

cydides, just as he will begin his poets with Homer, because he has been brought up to think that sort of thing. He is blinded, as usual, with the past. Give us a Greekless generation or two and the superstition will disappear.'' How are we to answer this?

With due humility, I think, and yet with a certain degree of confidence. According to Dionysius Thrax, the last and highest of the six divisions of *grammatikê* was *κρίσις ποιημάτων*, the judgment or criticism of works of imagination. And the voice of the great mass of trained *grammatikoi* counts for something. Of course they have their faults and prejudices, — the tradition constantly needs correcting, — but we must use the best criteria that we can get. As a rule, any man who reads Herodotus and Thucydides with due care and understanding recognizes their greatness. If a particular person refuses to do so, I think we can fairly ask him to consider the opinions of

recognized judges. And the judgment of those who know the *grammata* most widely and deeply will certainly put these Greek names very high in their respective lists.

On the ground of pure intellectual merit, therefore, apart from any other considerations, I think any person ambitious of obtaining some central grasp on the *grammata* of the human race would always do well to put a good deal of his study into Greek literature. Even if he were fatherless, like Melchizedek, or homeless, like a visitor from Mars, I think this would hold. But if he is a member of our Western civilization, a citizen of Europe or America, the reasons for studying Greek and Latin increase and multiply. Western civilization, especially the soul of it as distinguished from its accidental manifestations, is, after all, a unity and not a chaos; and it is a unity chiefly because of its ancestry, a unity of descent and of brotherhood. (If

any one thinks my word "brotherhood" too strong in the present state of Europe, I would remind him of the relationship between Cain and Abel.)

VII

The civilization of the Western world is a unity of descent and brotherhood; and when we study the *grammata* of bygone men we naturally look to the writings from which our own are descended. Now, I am sometimes astonished at the irrelevant and materialistic way in which this idea is interpreted. People talk as if our thoughts were descended from the fathers of our flesh, and the fountain-head of our present literature and art and feeling was to be sought among the Jutes and Angles.

"Paradise Lost" and "Prometheus Unbound" are not the children of "Piers Ploughman" and "Beowulf"; they are the children of Virgil and Homer, of Æs-

chylus and Plato. And "Hamlet" and "Midsummer Night's Dream" come mainly from the same ancestors, though by a less direct descent.

I do not wish to exaggerate. The mere language in which a book is written counts, of course, for much. It fixes to some extent the forms of the writer's art and thought. "Paradise Lost" is clearly much more English in character than the "Pharsalia" is Spanish or the "City of God" African. Let us admit freely that there must of necessity be in all English literature a strain of what one may call vernacular English thought, and that some currents of it, currents of great beauty and freshness, would hardly have been different if all Romance literature had been a sealed book to our tradition. It remains true that from the Renaissance onward — nay, from Chaucer and even from Alfred — the higher and more massive workings of our literature

owe more to the Greeks and Romans than to our own un-Romanized ancestors. And the same is true of every country in Europe. Even in Scandinavia, which possesses a really great home literature in some ways as noble as the Greek or the Hebrew, the main currents of literary thought and feeling, the philosophy and religion and the higher poetry, owe more to the Græco-Roman world than to that of the Vikings. The movements that from time to time spring up in various countries for reviving the old home tradition and expelling the foreigner have always had an exotic character. The German attempts to worship Odin, to regard the Empire as a gathering of the German tribes, to expel all non-Germanic words from the language by the help of an instrument called — not very fortunately — a "*Centralbureau*," have surely been symptoms of an error only not ridiculous because it is so deeply tragic. The

twisting of the English language by some fine writers, so that a simple Latin word like "cave" gives place to a recondite old English "stoneydark"; the attempts in France to reject the "*gaulois*" and become truly "*celtique*," are more attractive, but hardly in essence more defensible. There is room for them as protests, as experiments, as personal adventures, or as reactions against a dominant main stream. They are not a main stream themselves. The main stream is that which runs from Rome and Greece and Palestine, the Christian and classical tradition. We nations of Europe would do well to recognize it and rejoice in it. It is in that stream that we find our unity, unity of origin in the past, unity of movement and imagination in the present; to that stream that we owe our common memories and our power of understanding one another, despite the confusion of tongues that has now fallen upon us and

the inflamed sensibilities of modern nationalism. The German Emperor's dictum, that the boys and girls in his empire must "grow up little Germans and not little Greeks and Romans," is both intellectually a Philistine policy and politically a gospel of strife.

I trust no one will suppose that I am pleading for a dead orthodoxy or an enforced uniformity of taste or thought. There is always a place for protests against the main convention, for rebellion, paradox, partisanship, and individuality, and for every personal taste that is sincere. Progress comes by contradiction. Eddies and tossing spray add to the beauty of every stream and keep the water from stagnancy. But the true *grammaticus*, while expressing faithfully his personal predilections or special sensitiveness, will stand in the midst of the *grammata* not as a captious critic nor yet as a jealous seller of rival wares, but as

a returned traveller amid the country and landscape that he loves. The *traditio*, the handing-down of the intellectual acquisitions of the human race from one generation to another, the constant selection of thoughts and discoveries and feelings and events so precious that they must be made into books, and then of books so precious that they must be copied and re-copied and not allowed to die — the *traditio* itself is a wonderful and august process, full, no doubt, of abysmal gaps and faults, like all things human, but full also of that strange half-baffled and yet not wholly baffled splendour which marks all the characteristic works of man. I think the *grammaticus*, while not sacrificing his judgment, should accept it and rejoice in it — rejoice to be the intellectual child of his great forefathers, to catch at their spirit, to carry on their work, to live and die for the great unknown purpose which the eternal spirit of man seems

to be working out upon the earth. He will work under the guidance of love and faith, not, as so many do, under that of ennui and irritation.

VIII

My subject to-day has been the faith of a scholar, *religio grammatici*. This does not mean any denial or disrespect toward the religions of others. A *grammaticus* who cannot understand other people's minds is failing in an essential part of his work. The religion of those who follow physical science is a magnificent and life-giving thing. The *traditio* would be utterly imperfect without it. It also gives man an escape from the world about him — an escape from the noisy present into a region of facts which are as they are and not as foolish human beings want them to be; an escape from the commonness of daily happenings into the remote world of high and severely

trained imagination ; an escape from mortality in the service of a growing and durable purpose, the progressive discovery of truth. I can understand the religion of the artist, the religion of the philanthropist. I can understand the religion of those many people, mostly young, who reject alike books and microscopes and easels and committees, who forget both the before and the hereafter, and live rejoicing in an actual concrete present, which they can ennoble by merely loving it, as a happy man may get more beauty out of an average field of grass and daisies than out of all the landscapes in the National Gallery.

All these things are good, and those who pursue them may well be soldiers in one army or pilgrims on the same eternal quest. If we fret and argue and fight one another now, it is mainly because we are so much under the power of the enemy. I sometimes wish that we men of science and letters could

all be bound by some vow of renunciation or poverty, like monks of the Middle Ages; but of course no renunciation could be so all-embracing as really to save us from that power. The enemy has no definite name, though in a certain degree we all know him. He who puts always the body before the spirit, the dead before the living, the ἀναγκαῖον before the καλόν; who makes things only in order to sell them; who has forgotten that there is such a thing as truth, and measures the world by advertisement or by money; who daily defiles the beauty that surrounds him and makes vulgar the tragedy; whose innermost religion is the worship of the lie in his soul. The Philistine, the vulgarian, the great sophist, the passer of base coin for true, he is all about us and, worse, he has his outposts inside us, persecuting our peace, spoiling our sight, confusing our values, making a man's self seem greater than the

race and the present thing more important than the eternal. From him and his influence we find our escape by means of the *grammata* into that calm world of theirs, where stridency and clamour are forgotten in the ancient stillness, where the strong iron is long since rusted, and the rocks of granite broken into dust, but the great things of the human spirit still shine like stars pointing man's way onward to the great triumph or the great tragedy; and even the little things, the beloved and tender and funny and familiar things, beckon across gulfs of death and change with a magic poignancy, the old things that our dead leaders and forefathers loved, *viva adhuc et desiderio pulcriora*.[1]

1 "Living still and more beautiful because of our longing."

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